

## Clark Atlanta University

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Beauty and the Beast

In Person, Lena Horne by Lena Horne; His Eye Is on the Sparrow by Ethel Waters; Charles Samuels

Review by: Miles M. Jefferson

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who attend the Institute are helped by having many "experts" appear before them, but that does not justify publication of the experts' unprepared and unsystematic remarks. This book is too empty and unorganized and incorrect to serve as a text book or as a piece of propaganda. It is a shame when an accompanying blurb announces it is "the most correct, comprehensive analysis of civil rights as they affect race relations today," and the *New York Times* (March 12, 1951) is led to say — in a good-sized article — that it "summarizes the findings of interracial, civic, religious, educational and labor leaders" (note "findings").

I try to keep up with the literature on group relations, and it is increasingly difficult to find grains of wheat among the chaff. I have no objection to a good summary or an effective piece of propaganda — although I believe that a critical research or a penetrating insight is more valuable. But I think we hurt the cause in which we are interested when we work to get people to read rubbish.

Arnold M. Rose

### BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

IN PERSON, LENA HORNE. *By Lena Horne, as told to Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss. New York: Greenberg, 1950. 249 pp. Cloth, \$3.00. Paper, \$1.50.*

HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW. *By Ethel Waters, with Charles Samuels. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1951. 278 pp. \$3.00.*

Let's hasten to make it clear that comparing the autobiographies of Lena Horne and Ethel Waters to *Beauty and the Beast* does not call attention to the physical characteristics of the two august ladies!

Lena Horne enjoyed a comparatively quiet and normal upbringing, with a mother to look after her until she was old enough to take care of herself. She entered the precarious atmosphere of the nightclub and the theater at a tender age, but she never really faced the sordid realities of her environs in the way that Ethel Waters did, or else this side of her experience has been left untold. Miss Horne has traced the conventional and hackneyed course of her journey to success. The same temptations, the same disappointments, the same encounters with race prejudice and segregation and the same inner frustrations were hers, just as they were the torments along the way for Ethel Waters. But Miss Horne escaped most of the horrors accompanying the early life of Miss Waters, and most of the bitter disillusionments occurring later in Miss Waters' climb up the ladder. The Horne story reads like the story of Cinderella, with the final developments still to come. Cinderella Horne goes to the ball, but doesn't have to leave it at twelve o'clock, and she gets her Prince Charming, too. The major criticism of Miss Horne's story is that it reaches print prematurely. Much better would it have been for her to wait until she reached

the later years of her career when she would be able to see her life clearly and see it whole. As it is, she has no sober and mellow comments to make on her life. She whines about the embarrassments and complications of life as a Negro in the entertainment world, but these whimpers throw no new light on a condition with which we are already well acquainted. In the introduction to her book which she labels "Curtain Raiser," Miss Horne's collaborators, Helen Arstein and Carlton Moss, intimate that the star's reason for writing about her life was to answer the inquiries of her many fans clamoring for advice as to how to climb the ladder to success, possibly skipping a rung or two along the way. Her reason no doubt finds her devotees grateful, but unsatisfied. The space between the steps is vacant, and the climax to the journey has not been divulged because it has not been experienced by Miss Horne. The beautiful Cinderella Horne is still enjoying *The Ball*, even though the hour is after twelve.

Aside from the fact that Ethel Waters' autobiography, *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*, appears at the time that she has reached the climax of her career, it is tremendously successful because she has Told All, and with a deep honesty deriving from a self-security accompanying maturity and final achievement. Not that Miss Waters' career is over, but she can hardly expect greater honors than she has received, and her life mirrors an ultimate completeness that comes with full development. Many readers have found the Waters story vulgar and distasteful. Perhaps it is necessary to know Miss Waters, or at least to have met her, to realize the sordid details are not strung along the narrative string of her story for sensational purposes. The book reads like Ethel Waters talking. She is the kind of person you discover inside the covers of her book. You can hardly ask for more than integrity in an autobiography — integrity and a life interesting enough to share with the world. You have honesty in her book, and also a provocative revelation of the life of an amazing woman for whom the theater was as inevitable a destiny as life and death. Charles Samuels, with whom Miss Waters wrote her story, is entitled to all kinds of praise for what must have been a happy and intimate relationship during the planning and writing of the book. Miss Waters' personality pervades the story from beginning to end. One complaint, though: the research student in the theater will be handicapped by the absence of indexes in both the Waters and Horne revelations.

Miles M. Jefferson

### THE CHURCH AND VOODOOISM

**THE PENCIL OF GOD.** By Philippe Thorby-Marcelin and Pierre Marcelin. Translated by Leonard Thomas, with an introduction by Edmund Wilson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951. 204 pp. \$2.50.

A relatively short and rapidly moving novel, which as a result of expert blending of caste and class differences with those of church and